

Avaya Regulatory Solutions

Accessibility Through Communications for Persons with Disabilities

In a democracy, people have a fundamental right to access information and exchange it freely. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Sections 251 and 255 of the Telecommunication Act of 1996, and Section 508 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 guarantee that right to people with disabilities. And so it is that organizations must provide equivalent communications access for employees and customers who have disabilities that affect their ability to use telecommunications systems.

The federal government has estimated that 54 million Americans have a disability. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, after age 55 the proportion of Americans who have a sensory disability doubles (as a percentage of the total number of people with disabilities). In addition, Americans with a disability have an estimated annual disposable income of \$175 billion.

It is clear that even if it weren't a legal requirement, providing equal access through communications is a smart idea — making available a large, loyal, and talented labor pool and an untapped customer base. Avaya offers a large portfolio of telecommunication solutions designed to provide equal access to communications for people with disabilities. These solutions enable you to offer a wider range of jobs to people who have disabilities, as well as to serve the needs of a wider range of customers.

Messaging That Works for TTY Users

People who are hearing-impaired commonly use text telephone devices known as TTYs to communicate over telephone lines. But since an average of 75% of calls to any organization's employees are forwarded to a messaging system, it is important to consider what happens if the system is unable to prompt a caller in a TTY-compatible manner. What if the messaging system cannot record a TTY-format message? Under these conditions, the organization would be denying the TTY caller equal access to communication — not to mention losing a potential customer.

The flagship messaging systems from Avaya can allow callers to select whether they wish to be prompted by voice or in TTY format. These systems can also record and store TTY messages in the same mailbox where voice and other messages are stored.

Not all people who use TTY rely on it for both transmitting and receiving. Many TTY users are hard of hearing but still able to speak clearly, and may prefer to receive text on their TTYs and then speak in response — a process commonly referred to as Voice Carry Over (VCO). With Avaya messaging systems, callers are still able to record voice messages after selecting TTY prompting. Hearing Carry Over is also supported, so that even when voice prompting is selected, the systems are able to record TTY messages.

Avaya messaging systems permit people who “own” mailboxes to dial in by telephone to access a variety of user functions — generating and retrieving messages, doing directory lookups, automatically returning calls, etc. And with the exception of a few functions that are impractical because of limitations in TTY technology, Avaya’s messaging systems provide the same capabilities to TTY users. So in addition to leaving messages, TTY users can take advantage of an Avaya messaging system interface to log in and manage their messages via TTY.

The ability to support TTY messaging and TTY login is inherent in Avaya Modular Messaging, INTUITY™ AUDIX®, OCTEL® Messaging Systems, and Avaya IP Office VoiceMail Pro systems.

Enabling IP Telephones for People who are Visually Impaired

Consider for a moment all of the information that sighted users can obtain by looking at a typical business telephone: caller ID (name and number), whether there is a new message waiting, whether the phone is forwarded, which lines are available and which are on hold, etc. In fact, on some Avaya telephones the status of more than 200 different functions may be displayed visually.

For people who are visually impaired, the inability to access the same telephony information as sighted people can be a significant inconvenience. More importantly, it can be an insurmountable barrier to communication-centric jobs that might otherwise be ideal for people with disabilities, such as call center agent.

In response to this need, Avaya developed Universal Access Phone Status software, which can be used with standard, unmodified Avaya Model 4612 and 4624 IP Telephones. The software itself is loaded onto the user’s desktop PC. The PC establishes the connection with the IP telephone, monitors the status of the telephone displays (alphanumeric and LED), and then provides by voice output all of the information that is available to sighted users.

In addition to supporting standard telephony functions, Universal Access Phone Status can also be used for specialized applications. For example, when used in a call center, it can voice special information required by agents, such as the number of calls in queue and mean waiting time.

The software can also be configured for use by people who are hearing-impaired — providing a highly animated screen pop on the users’ PCs to alert them when they have an incoming call.

Avaya provides the Universal Access Phone Status software at no additional charge.

Increasing Access with Advanced Speech Processing

The capabilities of automatic speech recognition systems have improved tremendously in recent years. While there still are limitations, these systems can be extremely helpful to many people who have disabilities, particularly if functions are set up to be accessible by a variety of means (e.g., both speech and touch-tone response).

As a corporate descendant of Bell Laboratories, Avaya Laboratories is a world leader in speech processing technology. More importantly, Avaya is a leader in the development of products that use this technology in a helpful, reliable manner. There are many examples within the Avaya product line, including the innovative speech recognition adjuncts available for Avaya Contact Center solutions.

There are many ways to help employees and customers with disabilities with speech recognition adjuncts for Avaya Unified Communication Center solutions. These solutions can provide voice access to a wide range of telephony and information management functions, including call control and the ability to manage e-mail, voice messages, calendars, task lists, and contacts.

The Avaya Commitment

Avaya has a rich history of creating solutions that help individuals with disabilities participate more fully in life. Our corporate heritage and commitment predate by decades the laws that require such products. For example, our first TTY software for messaging systems was developed more than ten years ago; one of our attendant consoles that provides many of the capabilities of our Universal Access Phone Status software was developed some twenty years ago.

The engineers who developed these systems are still with Avaya and working on products that demonstrate our continued commitment to the principles of equal access. The products described here are just a small sample of Avaya Accessible Solutions. Please visit the Avaya Section 508 Web site for more information and other accessible products (www1.avaya.com/enterprise/508). Or for more information via TTY, please call 877-372-5719.

About Avaya

Avaya enables businesses to achieve superior results by designing, building, and managing their communications networks. More than 1 million businesses worldwide, including more than 90 percent of the FORTUNE 500®, rely on Avaya solutions and services to enhance value, improve productivity, and gain competitive advantage. Focused on enterprises large to small, Avaya is a world leader in secure and reliable IP telephony systems, communications software applications, and full lifecycle services. Driving the convergence of voice and data communications with leading-edge applications — and distinguished by comprehensive worldwide services — Avaya helps customers leverage existing and new networks to unlock value and enhance business performance.

© 2003 Avaya Inc. All Rights Reserved. Avaya and the Avaya Logo are trademarks of Avaya Inc. and may be registered in certain jurisdictions. All trademarks identified by ® or ™ are registered trademarks or trademarks, respectively, of Avaya Inc. except FORTUNE 500, which is a registered trademark of Time, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.
09/03